

## "I did not have sexual relations with that man, Mr. Jones!"



How many times have you read on the pages of the Cheyenne Herald: **"Anytime someone is 'too' something, step back. Chances are you need to be worried about them. At least be careful in their presence."**

Too honest. Too religious. Too faithful. Too anything. Back away.

The latest story out of Colorado Springs is the ultimate proof of my oft-stated axiom.

The Reverend Ted Haggard had been pastor of New Life Church, with a huge congregation (14,000) in the country's hotbed of evangelicals. He has also been president of the so-called "influential National Association of Evangelicals."

He had railed against homosexuality for years, he was openly in opposition to gay marriage, and generally comported himself as someone close to homophobic.

Then a few days ago, his "too" bubble was burst. All of a sudden, a story of deceit and deception on the part of the clergyman took more twists and turns than the highway to the summit in Rocky Mountain National Park.

"I've never heard of him. I don't know anyone named Mike Jones," said Ted.

Then that someone named Mike Jones produced an audiotape. On that tape, a man calling himself "Art" (the Reverend's middle name is Arthur), left an incriminating message for a guy he didn't know.

That audio tape was played and replayed by the broadcast media.

"Hi Mike, this is Art," the man of the cloth said to this perfect stranger. "Hey, I was just calling to see if we could get any more. Either \$100 or \$200 supply."

Perhaps he was inquiring about Hymnals, but it sounded just like the drug deals depicted on television shows.

Later the same day, another message was left for the guy Art (Ted) did not know. In this one, familiarity was apparent.

"Hi, Mike, this is Art, I am here in Denver and sorry that I missed you. But as I said, if you want to go ahead and get the stuff, then that would be great. And I'll get it sometime next week or the week after or whenever."

Now, it sounds like the clergyman, head of the world's largest evangelical group, wants his drug dealer to run a tab. Hold it for a week or so. I thought all drug deals had to be cash up front.

Oh, did I mention that Jones has said that the relationship he had with the powerful cleric was more than supplying meth, which the ousted Rev. Haggard said "he threw away"?

Now, here's a guy so charismatic, even if unintelligent, that he rose to the top of what is claimed to be a 30,000,000 membership group of the most religious persons in the world and he used his own middle name and placed orders for illegal drugs over the telephone?

This head of a 14,000 member congregation in Colorado Springs first said he did not know the accuser, then retreated to knowing him and buying meth from him (and getting a massage from him) - but not participating in the sexual activity that Jones said he had.

As the story was unfolding, congregants were asked to believe that their "Rev. Ted" (Haggard) had first lied about knowing the guy, then that he had purchased illegal drugs from him but had thrown those drugs away, had been in a room alone with him to receive a massage - but that was as far as it went. Do you believe?

Sounds like Chuck Robb's explanation to Lynda Byrd (Johnson) Robb about his massage in a hotel room - albeit from a former beauty queen. Female.

The mental image of this disgraced minister sitting behind the wheel of his family van (provided by the Church) conducting an interview through the open window on the passenger side - with his wife sitting in between him and the media looking dazed by the ongoing revelations - is not a pretty one. At the time, my thought was, what a jackass! Subjecting his wife to his admission that, "yes, I did buy meth from the guy" he had told her he did not know," and her knowing internally that the family's life was crumbling around his every word did not gain the guy any empathy or sympathy from me. But the next day, the picture was expanded and his children were also



"I did not have sexual relations with that woman, Miss Lewinsky" January 26, 1998

sitting in the car (back seat), listening as Dad is telling the gaggle of reporters and cameras that he had committed the act of a felon - in purchasing illegal drugs - and of a remorseless creep - in paying for a massage in a hotel room. From a male prostitute.

Did I mention that this Mike Jones had accused the pastor of engaging in homosexual behavior with him, and paying for it, for three years?

How many condemnations of homosexual behavior do you suppose this paragon of virtue, Rev. Ted Haggard, committed during those three years?

Quickly, a group of overseers was formed to act on what appeared to be improper and immoral behavior on the part of Rev. Ted Haggard. Faster than Congress can decide on members of a committee to stonewall and cover-up similar behavior on the part of a congressman (not congresswomen, yet), this church group threw the bum out on his keister. Good for them. They did the right thing. Fast.

That Board said they had found "without a doubt that he has committed sexually immoral conduct."

Does anyone believe buying meth and "throwing it away" or only getting what he

claimed was a massage was the "sexually immoral behavior" the Board found?

No, what had happened was this man, who tried for years to live a life he could not totally conform to, was guilty of the very behavior he had so often publicly condemned. And did not stop himself.

Remember, anyone "too" religious is to be suspected. At least many, if not most, of those fitting that description must be.

The paths this story has already taken and will take in the weeks and months ahead are too complicated to imagine.

Will Right Wing and ultraconservative Republicans now accept that Bill Clinton denied his sexual improprieties to protect his family - something this clergyman should have considered? Will the same group now accept that homosexuality is not the "choice" they maintain it is? To not show some tolerance on the subject will require admitting they had a fox in the hen house and they were duped by one of their own who chose conduct reprehensible to them.

Would a minister who had risen to the top of a group that condemns the acts he is accused of committing have risked his reputation, family and career for a choice that he had claimed to morally abhor?

Is it jumping the gun to presume that he did what Mike Jones has accused him of? Well, in his own confession, he has said, basically, that he had tried to live a lie all of his adult life.

What other damage has come out of this affair? Well, the Reverend initially said that he had been sent to this male masseur by "a hotel." Jones has said that was also untrue - that Haggard had come to his home on numerous occasions.

What hotel wants to have the reputation of pimping for guests? They could have, of course, thought they were referring someone for a massage, nothing else.

While Mark Foley was pretending to have the best interests of children in mind by protecting them from internet predators, he was doing the very thing he condemned. While Colorado wrestles with the issue of same-sex marriage, or unions of some legal kind, Ted Haggard preached to his huge throng to oppose the relationships, while in one himself.

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